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**RUSSIA AND NATO ENLARGEMENT: THE
ASSURANCES IN 1990 AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS**

by

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**RUSSIA AND NATO ENLARGEMENT: THE ASSURANCES IN 1990 AND
THEIR IMPLICATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the alleged assurances made to Moscow during German unification discussions in 1989-1990. Specifically, Moscow alleges that Western governments offered assurances to the Soviet Union that NATO would not expand beyond its then current borders if Moscow agreed to allow a unified Germany to join NATO as a full member. Since the first post-Cold War round of NATO expansion in 1997-1999, Moscow has raised the issue of broken promises made to the Soviet Union several times. While it can be argued that the Soviet Union had little choice but to yield to Western pressures, it appears that in 1990 some U.S. and West German officials gave informal assurances with respect to Soviet security concerns, including potential NATO expansion eastward. This thesis examines the hypothesis that the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, and other NATO countries did not make – and did not intend to make – a commitment ruling out future NATO enlargement, but that Soviet officials got the mistaken impression that such a commitment was made. The thesis investigates whether this hypothesis is supported by the evidence and considers how the Soviets received this impression. The thesis also discusses the implications of these misunderstandings for NATO-Russia relations.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this study is to clarify the assurances given to the Soviet Union by NATO governments in 1990 concerning NATO enlargement to the east and to analyze the continuing implications of these assurances. While the context of these assurances includes various aspects of German unification and the dissolution of the Soviet empire, the focus is on the specific assurances received by the Soviet Union concerning NATO enlargement following the unification of Germany. Both explicit and implicit assurances are discussed, with due attention to expectations and intent.

1. Importance

This research is significant because Moscow has raised the issue of broken promises made to the Soviet Union several times since the first post-Cold War round of NATO expansion in 1997-1999. Indeed, Alliance officials and experts anticipate hearing Russian complaints about Western betrayal whenever NATO enlargement is discussed. While Russia's grumbling may seem irrelevant to many policy makers and political leaders in NATO countries, this study may offer useful insights to those seeking a fuller understanding of the Russian perspective on Western behavior.

The diplomatic exchanges in highly charged and time-sensitive negotiations can have real and profound consequences. The negotiations involving the Four Powers with rights and responsibilities concerning Germany (France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and the two German states (the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic) in 1989-1990 about German unification included backroom and off-the-record discussions. The informal and formal dialogue produced the necessary trust-building foundations for fruitful settlements, including agreement on the withdrawal of Soviet forces from the unified Germany. The negotiations led to the unification of Germany with its inclusion in NATO as a full member and a formal end to Four Power rights.

While it can be argued that the Soviet Union had little choice but to yield to Western pressures, given that Soviet-allied Communist regimes were dissolving in Eastern and Central Europe, it appears that in 1990 some officials in NATO governments gave assurances with respect to Soviet security concerns, including potential NATO expansion eastward. Explicit denial by NATO governments of any such assurances when post-Cold War NATO expansion was first discussed in the mid-1990s confounded and outraged many Russian observers. Russia's irritation in this regard persists today. Russian President Vladimir Putin's Munich speech in February 2007 relates the contemporary perception of many in Russia:

And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Wöerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: "the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee." Where are these guarantees?¹

Russian actions also constitute evidence of this apparent disagreement as to the nature and content of the assurances given to Moscow in 1990. The August 2008 conflict between Russian and Georgian forces in Georgia and the security concerns voiced by Ukraine can be viewed as, at least in part, consequences of a Russian backlash to NATO's expressions of openness to eventual membership for Georgia and Ukraine at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008. Russian objections to Georgian and Ukrainian accession to NATO are illustrations of the distrust between NATO and Russia. This distrust stems in part, it seems, from the disagreement about the assurances that Moscow maintains that it received in 1990.

¹ Vladimir Putin, 10 February 2007, "Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," Munich Conference on Security Policy, <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179>.

B. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

The question of exactly what assurances were given to the Soviet Union in exchange for accepting German unification, including NATO membership for the unified Germany, should be placed in historical context. The published record suggests that there were in fact assurances made to the Soviet Union with respect to NATO enlargement. These assurances were given with consideration to Soviet security concerns and in the context of geopolitical balance-of-power dynamics. The following question stands out as one of critical significance: should these assurances apply in changed political circumstances, including the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the fall of the Soviet Union? From the Russian perspective they clearly remain valid. Russian officials and experts maintain that, while the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union no longer exist, balance-of-power issues are still relevant, specifically with respect to alliance commitments, conventional forces, and nuclear forces. Additionally, Russians assert that Moscow should have an equal voice in European security discussions and hold that the expansion of NATO further east jeopardizes Russian security interests.

This thesis examines the hypothesis that the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, and other NATO countries did not make – and did not intend to make – a commitment ruling out future NATO enlargement, but that Soviet officials got the mistaken impression that such a commitment was made. The thesis investigates whether this hypothesis is supported by the evidence and considers how the Soviets received this impression.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

In conducting research for this thesis, a variety of sources were consulted. Western sources, including official and direct participant accounts, as well as secondary sources and analytical works, were helpful in gaining a better understanding of the debate surrounding the assurances allegedly offered to the Soviet Union. Russian sources were examined to obtain a clearer view of Moscow's perspective on the perceived assurances regarding NATO expansion.

In attempting to understand the formal and informal positions taken during the German unification process, it is important to gather as much information as possible and strive to analyze all sides of the debate. In this controversy there are at least four distinct positions: those of the German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union. France and the United Kingdom (the other countries in the so-called “2 plus 4” negotiations) acknowledged that German unification was unavoidable but favored a slower process to control possible destabilizing aspects of this unification. However, France and the United Kingdom do not appear to have offered the Soviet Union any assurances about the possibility of NATO enlargement after German unification. The subject seems not to have been raised with London and Paris.

It is important to compare the differing positions to appreciate the distinct concerns of specific observers. From the U.S. perspective, definitive accounts closely narrate and analyze the unification process and outcome. These include *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*, by Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice; former Secretary of State James Baker III’s memoirs, entitled *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992*; and *A World Transformed*, by former President George H. W. Bush and his National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft. All provide descriptions by insiders of the diplomatic efforts made by all the principal players in the German unification discussions.

For example, Zelikow and Rice recount a conversation between Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze, then the Soviet Foreign Minister:

To ease Soviet concerns, Baker used the formula he had picked up from [Hans-Dietrich] Genscher [then the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany] and, turning Genscher’s ‘no extension of NATO’ language into a more lawyerly formulation, promised that if a united Germany were included in NATO, there would be ironclad guarantees ‘that NATO’s jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward.’²

² Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 180.

This precise information is historically invaluable and provides the foundation necessary for an analysis of the U.S. position as it was subsequently developed and clarified. While the above works present a distinctly Western perception and place the United States in a decidedly central role in the German unification process, they are foundational texts that were composed on the basis of direct participation in the events or special access to pertinent documents. They must therefore be included in any study of the German unification process.

The pace of events leading up to German unification took both participants and observers by surprise. Journalists nonetheless made invaluable contributions to the historical record. In her books *Beyond the Wall: Germany's Road to Unification*, and *After the Wall: American Policy Toward Germany*, Elizabeth Pond, a journalist based in Germany and a discerning witness to German unification, cast a critical eye on the celebrated episode. Her work as a reporter in Bonn for nearly a decade allowed for timely access to the major European political figures and enabled her to quickly analyze cause and effect. With regard to Genscher's proposed plan for German inclusion in NATO and its implications, she wrote, "This package quickly became NATO's position. It extended NATO protection to the area of the GDR (though this was not immediately clear), yet still offered unilateral restraint. It could, the West hoped, save face for Gorbachev and let him argue to his domestic critics that NATO was not, as the Americans put it, 'taking advantage of' the Soviet loss of empire."³ Pond provides the perspective of an authoritative unofficial witness of events, and this is historically necessary for comprehensiveness.

As might be anticipated, much has been written with respect to the German role in the negotiation process. For example, Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen and Manfred Görtemaker, in their books *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* and *Unifying Germany, 1989-1990* respectively, give German-centered accounts of unification. They

³ Elizabeth Pond, *After the Wall: American Policy Toward Germany* (New York: Brookings Institution, 1990), 44.

provide comprehensive analyses from the perspective of Germany's central role in the high-paced negotiations. Russian perceptions of broken promises and false assurances have had, and may continue to have, far-reaching implications.

D. METHODS AND SOURCES

This thesis undertakes a critical analysis of the historical evidence regarding different interpretations of the commitments regarding NATO enlargement expressed by key Alliance governments during the 1989-1990 German unification process. The thesis examines the historical record and available analyses of the explicit and implicit assurances, with special attention to expectations and intentions. While most Western sources provide similar accounts, differences exist in perspective and with regard to the significance of particular dialogues.

While there was no talk of NATO enlargement immediately after the unification of Germany in October 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, discussions about expanding the Alliance began in early 1993. By 1999, NATO had expanded to include three former Warsaw Pact members (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland).⁴ In 2004 three more former Warsaw Pact members (Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia), three former Soviet republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), and one former Yugoslav republic (Slovenia) joined NATO. The thesis discusses Russia's reactions to these events in light of the Russian view that commitments not to enlarge NATO have been violated. The thesis then considers implications for further NATO enlargement. Moreover, this thesis examines the importance of trust-building and the possible consequences of deficiencies in trust in U.S.-Russian and NATO-Russian relations.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter II reviews the perspective of the Federal Republic of Germany and describes the assurances given to Moscow by FRG officials in return for Soviet agreement to Germany's unification and membership in

⁴ The Czech Republic was part of Czechoslovakia until 1993. Czechoslovakia was a member state of the Warsaw Pact from 1955 to 1991.

NATO. Chapter III examines the implicit and explicit assurances given to the Soviet Union from the United States perspective and explains why these assurances were critical to the unification process. Chapter IV reviews NATO positions, including British and French views, and offers evidence that may explain why Moscow was convinced that NATO would not expand beyond the territory of the GDR if the Soviet Union agreed to a united Germany in NATO. Chapter V examines the Soviet perspective and, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian perspective. This chapter includes the Soviet understandings of the assurances that the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany offered and why those assurances were important to Soviet decision-making about German unification and European security. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the consequences and implications of the 1990 misunderstanding between the Soviet Union and key Western governments, including the loss of the trust gained during the German unification discussions.

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II. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

This chapter reviews the perspective of the Federal Republic of Germany and discusses the assurances given to the Soviet Union by FRG officials in return for Moscow's agreement to Germany's unification and membership in NATO.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, many Germans demanded that talks begin regarding the unification of Germany. As the leading powers of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively, had key roles in this process, which resulted in a united Germany on 3 October 1990. Central to the unification discussions was the united Germany's relationship with NATO. The Federal Republic of Germany (the FRG, West Germany) was a member of NATO, and the German Democratic Republic (the GDR, East Germany) was a member of the Warsaw Pact. The FRG and the United States were determined that a united Germany be a full member of NATO, while the Soviet Union preferred different arrangements.

In the East, both the Soviet and East German elites had reservations about the unification. Moscow was witnessing the end of an empire. The GDR had come to be viewed as not just a product of the Soviet Union's post-World War II occupation zone but as an independent state integral to European balance and security. Moreover, "The belief was also widespread that the GDR was not only an international necessity but in time had become a natural entity. In this view its existence was necessary for the stability of Europe and the precarious balance between the East and West and it had succeeded in creating its own identity embraced by its people."⁵

The FRG's Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, in the unexpected turn of events brought about by the fall of the wall, became a hero of German unification. Prior to November 1989, Kohl had enjoyed lukewarm popularity at best. West Germany had in recent years been politically divided with respect to nuclear weapons and other issues in NATO strategy. A growing left-wing movement led by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had

⁵ Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 58.

called for “an undefined security partnership between Bonn and Moscow.”⁶ This was in response to left-wing intellectuals who tended to equate cooperation with American hegemony in Western Europe with coercive Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe.⁷ Despite increasing pressure from the left, Kohl held that preserving solidarity with Washington was essential in maintaining Western unity. Moreover, Kohl had been a long promoter of a one-Germany policy, dismissed by most in West Germany as unrealistic. It was in this context that Kohl, when visiting Berlin on 10 November, stood on a podium and declared: “We are and remain one nation. We belong together.”⁸ Kohl had taken the historic initiative and thrust himself into a central role in unification negotiations.

Despite the absence of a clear mandate from the Four Powers to do so, Kohl delivered a ten-point plan for German unification on 28 November 1989. His plan outlined both internal and external paths to unification, specifically including the European Community (EC) and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as institutional necessities for unification. Additionally, intentionally or not, when he addressed “transnational security structures,” there was no mention of NATO or the Warsaw Pact, but simply “an organic development which takes into consideration the interests of all parties concerned and guarantees a peace order in Europe.”⁹ Communicating his disapproval of Kohl’s plan in a telephone conversation on 10 December 1989, Gorbachev, speaking with the new chairman of the Socialist Unity Party – Party of Democratic Socialism (SED-PDS), Gregor Gysi, “stated that the Soviet Union would reject any attempt by the West to infringe on East German sovereignty. ‘The stability of the German Democratic Republic depends, in no small degree, on the stability of the European continent,’ he told Gysi.”¹⁰

⁶ Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1993), ~~p.~~ 29. [do not use p. or pp. for pages; just use numbers; revise all](#)

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸ Kohl quoted in Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 68.

⁹ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 120.

¹⁰ Manfred Görtemaker, *Unifying Germany, 1989-1990* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 111.

For the East German elite, German unification represented the final nail in the coffin of their political future. They were witnessing peaceful revolutions in many of the surrounding Eastern Bloc countries with reforms being implemented more rapidly than anyone had anticipated six months earlier. Power was slipping quickly through their fingers and German unification guaranteed a reduction of their personal influence. That German unification occurred at all, and the swiftness with which it was implemented, constitute a testament to the statesmen involved in the process and to the resolve of the German people as a whole.

In January 1990, discussions began that attempted to address the security arrangements of a united Germany. An early proposal, presented by GDR Prime Minister Hans Modrow after he recognized the inevitability of unification, was for a neutral united Germany, disavowing membership in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.¹¹ This position “envisioned a treaty setting the course for German unity, implying a gradual step-by-step path toward a new confederation.”¹² The Modrow proposal was flatly rejected by the West and was considered to be a signal for negotiations to begin for the united Germany’s international security arrangement.¹³

Modrow’s plan was initially welcomed by Moscow for at least two reasons. First, Gorbachev was committed to the idea of national self-determination for the two Germanys and Modrow’s plan clearly supported this. Second and more importantly, Gorbachev was in a precarious position. Moscow was quickly seeing its hold on Eastern Europe give way and the perception by many hard-line conservatives in Moscow was that Gorbachev was responsible. From the perspective of Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders, Modrow’s plan, while doing little to stall unification talks, at least prevented a strengthening of NATO.

¹¹ Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 108.

¹² Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 174.

¹³ Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 171.

Furthermore, for Moscow the logic of a neutral Germany seemed clear. Elizabeth Pond writes, “The corollaries were implicit: if a united Germany could not be a member of NATO, that meant that West Germany would quit the Western alliance, and if the Federal Republic withdrew from NATO, Congress would surely pull back U.S. forces deployed in the Federal Republic and elsewhere on the continent.”¹⁴ It was for this reason that the Modrow plan was first agreed to by Gorbachev and rejected outright by Kohl and Bush.

At about the same time Modrow announced his plan, Bonn announced its own plan for the united Germany’s external security arrangement. “The first Western officials to define the parallel needs of avoiding humiliation of Moscow and confrontation between NATO and unification in West Germany were Foreign Minister Genscher and Kohl’s security adviser, Horst Teltschik.”¹⁵ On 31 January 1990 Genscher outlined a possible compromise: “Genscher proposed that there be ‘no expansion of NATO territory eastward.’ The former GDR would not be incorporated into NATO or NATO’s military structures. Indeed, NATO itself, along with the Warsaw Pact, would become ‘elements’ of new ‘cooperative security structures throughout Europe.’”¹⁶

This was the first time that Moscow was assured that the government of the FRG was exploring an arrangement whereby NATO would not be expanded eastward. Genscher’s proposal also implied that NATO, in its current arrangement, would be transformed into an entity oriented toward “cooperative security” relations with the Soviet Union. Further, the implication was that there would be shared decision making in European security affairs, offering Moscow an active role in the management of international security affairs in Europe.

Central to the security arrangement that Genscher proposed was the CSCE. The suggestion of using the CSCE was deliberately advanced to appease the Soviets.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 175. [do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page; revise](#)

¹⁵ Elizabeth Pond, *After the Wall: American Policy Toward Germany* (New York: Brookings Institution, 1990), p. 44.

¹⁶ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 174-175.

Moscow saw in the CSCE a possible and reasonable basis for a new security arrangement because it would give the Soviet Union an equal voice in European security affairs. For Genscher's plan to work, the CSCE would have to be strengthened "with a new framework to be agreed on at the CSCE summit,"¹⁷ which was proposed by the Soviets for sometime in 1990. Unclear in the plan, and of particular concern to the United States, was how a united Germany could be absorbed into NATO without expanding the Alliance's security commitments to include the former GDR. Intelligence reports available to American officials pointed to Genscher's lack of logic and alleged that "Genscher saw NATO as continuing only in the short term, and that he was considering announcing new pan-European security ideas later in 1990."¹⁸ Genscher's plan placed the Americans in a difficult position. The United States did not want to be seen as standing in the way of unifying Germany and any public objection to German proposals threatened to limit U.S. leverage in the process. While the details would be negotiated, the Genscher Plan would later form the framework for a final settlement and the foundation for two-plus-four negotiations.

On 28 January 1990, after consultation with Secretary of State James Baker, State Department Director of Policy Planning Dennis Ross began developing a concept for German unification discussions that would later be known as the two-plus-four concept. This formula would allow for the two Germanys to negotiate their domestic affairs (economic, legal, political, etc.) without external interference. External elements of unification, particularly the international security arrangements of a unified Germany, would be equally discussed among the Four Powers (Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States), the GDR and the FRG.¹⁹

While the two-plus-four concept was being considered and debated, a more fundamental question had yet to be answered. Would Moscow agree to a unified Germany? The issue would be settled on 10 February 1990 when Kohl met with

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 175. [do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page; revise](#)

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁹ Manfred Görtemaker, *Unifying Germany, 1989-1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 160.

Gorbachev in Moscow. During the course of their meeting, Kohl outlined the current state of German affairs since the opening of the Berlin wall in November 1989 and pressed the point that unification was “irresistible and unstoppable.”²⁰ Kohl approached the subject of alliances with care.

Neutralization of Germany would be ‘unacceptable and a historical stupidity,’ as Germany’s post-1918 isolation and Schaukelpolitik had shown, Kohl stated. He would be prepared, however, to take the security interests of the Soviet Union into account and could therefore imagine not extending NATO to the territory of the GDR.²¹

After several more exchanges between the two, Gorbachev leaned forward and quietly said that

There were no differences of opinion...between the Soviet Union, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the GDR about unity and the people’s right to strive for it; the people had to know themselves in what direction they wanted to go; the Germans in both East and West had already proven that they had drawn their lesson from history; no war would start on German soil.²²

This historical breakthrough between Germany and the Soviet Union allowed for the start of formal negotiations.

It was on 13 February 1990 in Ottawa that the two-plus-four concept was agreed to by all parties. A two-plus-four conference would be established to negotiate the external elements of German unification and the final termination of Four Power rights and responsibilities that had been in place since the end of World War II. This two-plus-four conference would become the formal body for German unification negotiations and lead to a settlement at a pace faster than most had anticipated or, in some cases, even felt comfortable with.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 136. [do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page; revise](#)

²¹ Ibid., p. 136.

²² Ibid., p. 136.

While the two-plus-four framework embodied the formal functions of negotiation, security guarantees would be sought by any means available. In the months leading up to the first two-plus-four meeting, there were meetings among the various organizations and key countries involved in the unification process, including meetings among Western leaders, bilateral Western-Soviet discussions, NATO meetings, and European Community meetings. At the top of the agenda at nearly all meetings was the disposition of Germany with regard to NATO. At the first two-plus-four meeting, there was near consensus among the participating countries (except for the Soviet Union) that the united Germany should be included in NATO. At first the Soviets had insisted that a unified Germany should be neutral, but by April 1990 they had softened their position but retained the insistence that a unified Germany could not be part of NATO.²³

Recognizing the growing economic difficulty in the Soviet Union, confirmed by a request by Shevardnadze for German credit guarantees, Kohl understood the precarious position that Gorbachev was in. Mounting economic pressure, coupled with hard-line Communist Party opposition to a unified Germany in NATO, threatened Gorbachev's position of power. In an effort to bolster domestic support for Gorbachev and to persuade him to accept the idea of a united Germany in NATO, Kohl decided to help. In mid-May 1990, following a confidential credit assessment visit to Moscow by German banking officials, Kohl agreed to help Gorbachev with approximately DM5 billion worth of credit guarantees.²⁴

In a further effort to reassure Moscow and garner acceptance of a unified Germany in NATO, Foreign Minister Genscher met with Shevardnadze in Geneva on 23 May 1990 with a package of concessions. Included was an offer to pay upwards of \$750 million a year for at least five years for the continued deployment of Soviet troops in East Germany, new bank credits, economic aid, the assumption by West Germany of East German contracts to supply the Soviets with uranium, and a promise to urge NATO to

²³ Constantine C. Menges, *The Future of Germany and the Atlantic Alliance* (Washington: AEI Press, 1991), p. 103.

²⁴ Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 195.

revise its strategy of flexible response.²⁵ Nevertheless, Gorbachev continued to maintain his position that a united Germany should not be part of NATO. His logic was that “the West would certainly oppose a reunified Germany’s joining the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, and therefore the West should sympathize with the Soviet Union’s opposition to a reunified Germany in NATO.”²⁶ Moscow preferred the creation of a cooperative security structure for Europe as a whole, preferably under the auspices of the CSCE, and would be much more willing to discuss a unified Germany in NATO if the Alliance were of a political rather than a military nature. While many in Europe were willing to discuss exactly that, U.S. policy makers were adamantly opposed to any radical change in the Alliance’s collective defense function.

The difficult negotiations to gain Moscow’s agreement to a united Germany in NATO were concluded on 15 July 1990. In response to an invitation from Gorbachev to meet with him in his hometown of Stavropol, Kohl flew to Moscow in 14 July. The next day, before departing for Stavropol, Kohl, his diplomatic advisor Horst Teltschik, and his interpreter Andreas Weiss met with Gorbachev, his advisor Anatoly Chernayev, and interpreter Ivan Kurpakov. During this private meeting Kohl and Gorbachev openly discussed the much-debated external elements of German unification, specifically, a united Germany’s relationship with NATO.²⁷ Gorbachev began by pointing out the importance of a normalized German-Soviet relationship. Kohl interrupted and brought Gorbachev to the real points of contention:

When Kohl interjected that three points were important now – the withdrawal of Soviet forces from the GDR, the membership of a united Germany in NATO, and the future ceiling of the armed forces of a unified Germany – Gorbachev paused for a moment. Then he quietly and earnestly conceded that Germany could remain a member

²⁵ Constantine C. Menges, *The Future of Germany and the Atlantic Alliance* (Washington: AEI Press, 1991), p. 106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106. [do not use Ibid as first footnot on a page; revise to complete footnote](#)

²⁷ Manfred Görtemaker, *Unifying Germany, 1989-1990* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 194.

of NATO if the scope of the alliance was not extended to the territory of the GDR as long as Soviet forces were stationed there.²⁸

The German question was now settled, but the agreement would remain secret until formal negotiations resumed the next morning.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 194. do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page; revise

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III. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE UNITED STATES

This chapter reviews the implicit and explicit assurances given to the Soviet Union by United States representatives and explains why these assurances were critical to the unification process.

This chapter is intended to clarify the assurances given to the Soviet Union by the United States in 1990 concerning NATO enlargement to the east and to consider the continuing implications of these assurances. While the context of these assurances includes various aspects of German unification and the dissolution of the Soviet empire, the focus is on the specific assurances received by the Soviet Union concerning NATO enlargement following the unification of Germany. Both explicit and implicit assurances are discussed, with due attention to expectations and intent.

Of paramount concern to the West during the negotiations was helping the Soviet Union psychologically manage the loss of its empire. Not only was there a call for German unification, but also many of the Warsaw Pact members were instituting reforms that put the future of the Warsaw Pact in jeopardy. Shevardnadze candidly acknowledged to Baker the road ahead for the dying Soviet empire: “[W]e have a problem with NATO. It’s an imagery problem. It would look as if you had won and we had lost. The short-term problem is, how can we explain this domestically? The long-term problem is, how do you know that what we’ll see ten years from now is going to be what we want?”²⁹ By January 1990, the problem for Gorbachev was not German unification per se; it was how to sell the concept to his people, particularly conservative Communist Party members. According to Jack Matlock, who was the U.S. ambassador to the USSR during the German unification negotiations, “With the Warsaw Pact already in the final stages of dissolution, the image of NATO expanding to include all of Germany while Soviet troops abandoned the area and the other Soviet ‘allies’ became

²⁹ Shevardnadze quoted in Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), p. 198.

neutral and potentially hostile suggested to the public a Soviet defeat tantamount to losing a war.”³⁰ It was in the above context that the negotiations for German unification took place.

A short time after the announcement of the Genscher Plan, Genscher told Secretary of State Baker about his concerns with respect to the Soviets. “Baker understood Genscher to say that Germany would remain in NATO, but the Soviets had to be assured that NATO’s territorial coverage would not extend to the former GDR.”³¹ Baker understood Genscher’s concern and kept it in mind when he met with Shevardnadze in Moscow on 8 February 1990. A key idea that Baker wanted to impress upon Shevardnadze was that the United States opposed the Modrow plan and that the USSR should be concerned as well with the prospect of a neutral Germany. A Germany not anchored in a political institution such as NATO might acquire nuclear weapons.³²

One of the benefits of maintaining a united Germany in NATO would be that NATO would provide a built-in check on potential German armament ventures. Further, to directly address the Soviet Union’s security concerns from a strategic perspective, Baker offered Shevardnadze a bold assurance: “Baker used the formula he had picked up from Genscher and, turning Genscher’s ‘no extension of NATO’ language into a more lawyerly formulation, promised that if a united Germany were included in NATO, there would be ironclad guarantees ‘that NATO’s jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward.’”³³

In a meeting the next day with Gorbachev, Baker reiterated his position: “there would be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east.”³⁴ Later in the meeting, while considering the options of an independent neutral Germany without U.S. forces or a Germany tied to NATO with assurances that NATO

³⁰ Jack F. Matlock, Jr, *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 383-384.

³¹ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 176.

³² *Ibid.*, 180.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

would not extend its current jurisdiction eastward, Gorbachev stated that one thing was clear: “‘Any extension of the zone of NATO is unacceptable.’ ‘I agree,’ Baker replied.”³⁵

These exchanges between Baker and both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev are examples of clear, explicit, informal assurances given to Moscow in the hopes of preventing the pursuance of neutrality for Germany while addressing Soviet geopolitical security concerns. These exchanges are, however, absent from Secretary of State Baker’s memoirs. His account reads, “Gorbachev said, ‘Certainly, any extension of the zone of NATO is unacceptable.’ But he also said, ‘I believe the presence of U.S. troops could be very constructive and be positive in the situation as it evolves...The lessons of the past tell us that Germany must stay within European structures.’”³⁶ It is important to note that Baker’s account of the discussion with Gorbachev omits any mention of commitments made to limit NATO expansion. In fact, while Baker was in Moscow, the White House instructed Baker “to limit his concessions to the Soviets to the principle that only German forces could be stationed on the territory of the former East Germany.”³⁷

Jack F. Matlock, who was then the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and closely involved in the negotiations, also alluded to the 9 February 1990 meeting. In Congressional testimony given on 20 June 1996, Matlock recounted his understanding of certain assurances given to Gorbachev: “We began to talk to them about ways we could change NATO’s strategy to make it more acceptable, and finally, Gorbachev did get an informal, but clear, commitment that if Germany united and stayed in NATO, the borders of NATO would not move eastward. All right, that wasn’t a legal commitment, but it was made.”³⁸ Matlock confirmed this recollection in an interview with Michael R. Gordon for an article entitled “The Anatomy of a Misunderstanding.” Matlock stated,

35 Ibid., p. 183. [do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page; revise](#)

36 James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: Putnam, 1995), p. 235.

37 David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed* (Washington: United States Institute for Peace Press: 1998), p. 134.

38 U.S. Policy Toward NATO Enlargement, Hearing Before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Fourth Congress, Second Session, June 20, 1996 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1996), p. 31.

“When Gorbachev and others say that it is their understanding NATO expansion would not happen, there is a basis for it.”³⁹ According to Gordon, “Mr. Matlock said the Russians have a point when they say Mr. Gorbachev received a blanket promise that NATO would not expand. Mr. Baker, he said, never formally retracted the pledge that NATO’s ‘jurisdiction’ would not extend eastward.”⁴⁰ In preparation for his article, Gordon also interviewed Baker. Baker stated that “he never intended to rule out the admission of new NATO members. ‘I got off the word ‘jurisdiction’ very quickly...I do not recall using it with the Soviets. But let’s assume I did use it once or twice. We quickly walked away from it.”⁴¹

Matlock’s accounts do not specify which meetings he attended or who was involved. Some insight into these questions can be found in Hannes Adomeit’s working paper entitled *Gorbachev’s Consent to Unified Germany’s Membership in NATO*. In an interview on 10 February 1997 Matlock revealed that he was present at the meeting between Gorbachev and Baker on 9 February 1990, and he confirmed the accuracy of the report about the exchange cited earlier when Gorbachev said, “Any extension of the zone of NATO is unacceptable,” and Baker replied, “I agree.”⁴² While this interview helps to clarify the context of Matlock’s 1996 congressional testimony, it does present another inconsistency in the published accounts of this controversial and important exchange. Zelikow and Rice specifically identify who was present at the 9 February 1990 meeting: “Baker was accompanied by Dennis Ross, who took notes, and an interpreter. Gorbachev was joined by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, a note taker, and an interpreter.”⁴³ This depiction appears definitive, yet is clearly inconsistent with Matlock’s statement.

³⁹ Michael R. Gordon, “The Anatomy of a Misunderstanding,” *New York Times*, 25 May 1997, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A06E3D8113BF936A15756C0A961958260>, (accessed 8 April 2009).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Hannes Adomeit, *Gorbachev’s Consent to Unified Germany’s Membership in NATO*, Working Paper FG5 2006/11 (Berlin: Stifaung Wissenschaft und Politik, 11 December 2006), p. 6.

⁴³ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 421.

In contrast, in an article published in 1995, Philip Zelikow adamantly rejected the view that an assurance was made ~~which~~^{that} prevented NATO from expanding. He wrote that the talks in early February 1990 were focused on NATO expansion into the former East German state. According to Zelikow, “There is no evidence that in late January or early February of 1990 anyone — Mr. Genscher, James Baker or Mikhail Gorbachev — was even thinking, much less talking, about the possibility of NATO expansion even further into East-Central Europe.”⁴⁴ He wrote that, while the offer to not expand NATO eastward into the territory of the GDR may have been given, revisions to that offer were made and agreed upon by the Soviets in July 1990 that would include NATO security coverage for all of a united Germany. Zelikow concluded, “the option of adding new members to NATO has not been foreclosed by the deal actually made in 1990.”⁴⁵ In other words, Zelikow’s position is that controversial assurances were discussed in the context of, and limited to, NATO and Germany. U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright took this position as well in Congressional testimony discussing NATO expansion:

The treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany that was signed in 1990 had to do only with German unification and how NATO would act within Germany, and the treaty restrictions do not apply with respect to other states to the west or east of Germany and therefore have no bearing on NATO enlargement.⁴⁶

The claim that assurances were made outside the context of the German question and its relationship with NATO necessarily redefines the entire context and content of the negotiation process.

⁴⁴ Philip Zelikow, “NATO Expansion Wasn’t Ruled Out,” *International Herald Tribune*, 10 August 1995, <http://www.iht.com/articles/1995/08/10/edzel.t.php>, (accessed 8 April 2009).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *The Administration’s Proposal on NATO Enlargement*, Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, One Hundred Fifth Congress, First Session, April 23, 1997 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1997), p. 60.

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IV. BRITISH, FRENCH AND NATO PERSPECTIVES

This chapter considers NATO positions, including British and French views, and discusses evidence that may explain why Moscow was convinced that NATO would not expand beyond the territory of the GDR if the Soviet Union agreed to a united Germany's membership in NATO.

In retrospect, German unification in 1990 seems to have been almost inevitable. However, this was not the case at all. When the euphoria over the possibility of German unification was heard the loudest, not everyone was encouraged by such a prospect. The fall of the Berlin wall raised the question, "What of NATO and the Warsaw Pact?" When calls for German unification began, observers immediately began looking to history to best forge the way ahead. For some in the West, former NATO secretary general Lord Ismay's famous remark, that the alliance was formed to keep the "Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down,"⁴⁷ came to mind. Indeed, according to Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, "Some German observers commented, perhaps only half ironically, that they almost got the impression that most participants felt that NATO and the Warsaw Pact were needed because of the Germans rather than because of the East-West division."⁴⁸

The British and the French, in particular, initially voiced concern over German unification. Historically, both countries had suffered much at the hands of a powerful Germany; and, preceding the fall of the Berlin wall, they had witnessed the FRG's economy boom. "The economic weight of the Bundesrepublik had left both Britain and France clearly behind, but a united Germany would be in a different league. The size of its economy would be close to the size of the British and French economies put together."⁴⁹ In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* published on 26 January 1990,

⁴⁷ Ismay quoted in David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed* (Washington: United States Institute for Peace Press: 1998), p. 52.

⁴⁸ Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher warned that, “if German unification went too fast, it could have the disastrous effect of toppling Gorbachev. It would in any case disrupt the economic balance within the EC, where Germany already dominated.”⁵⁰

This comment is placed in its proper context in Thatcher’s memoir *The Downing Street Years*. She recalled a meeting in September 1989 with Gorbachev. “I explained to him that although NATO had traditionally made statements supporting Germany’s aspiration to be reunited, in practice we were rather apprehensive.”⁵¹ Gorbachev confirmed “that the Soviet Union did not want German reunification either.”⁵² This meeting, occurring prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, appears to have set the tone for later remarks concerning German unification.

In a meeting of European Community heads of government in Paris on 18 November 1989, Thatcher forthrightly voiced her concerns regarding the political changes taking place in Eastern Europe. She wrote:

I said that though the changes taking place were historic we must not succumb to euphoria. The changes were only just beginning and it would take several years to get genuine democracy and economic reform in eastern Europe. There must be no question of changing borders. The Helsinki Final Act must apply. Any attempt to talk about either border changes or German reunification would undermine Mr. Gorbachev and also open up a Pandora’s box of border claims right through central Europe.⁵³

Thatcher’s unabashed desire for a slow and drawn-out German unification process was foundationally rooted in her fear of a strong, resurgent Germany. Her perception was based on a belief in a German national character that has “since the unification of Germany under Bismark...veered unpredictably between aggression and self-doubt.”⁵⁴ She went on to write: “Moreover, Germany has always looked east as well as west,

50 Thatcher quoted in Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 157.

51 Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 792.

52 Ibid., p. 792.

53 Ibid., pp. 793-4.

54 Ibid., p. 791.

though it is economic expansion rather than territorial aggression which is the modern manifestation of this tendency. Germany is thus by its very nature a destabilizing rather than a stabilizing force in Europe.”⁵⁵ This belief in Germany’s destabilizing nature led to Thatcher’s determination that a unified Germany be integrated in NATO, if for no other reason than to be watched over. Indeed, she wrote, “Only the military and political engagement of the United States in Europe and close relations between the other two strongest sovereign states in Europe – Britain and France – are sufficient to balance German power.”⁵⁶ Some French leaders shared Thatcher’s concerns, yet were more subtle in their approach.

The memory of German occupation and brutality held deep roots among leading members of the French political elite. In the eyes of some French observers, the Gaullist dream of French dominance in Europe was once again taking a back seat to the Federal Republic of Germany’s economic and now territorial expansion. This time their fear was not German military dominance but, like that of the British, German economic supremacy. French President François Mitterrand, unlike his British counterpart, was much more cunning in his objection to rapid German unification. Mitterrand placed a portion of his argument in the context of the future of the EC and stressed that the EC should be deepened politically before being widened to include the more unstable economies of Central and Eastern Europe that Bonn had been supporting.⁵⁷ In essence, his argument was that widening would come at the expense of deepening.

This is not to say that Mitterrand was against German unification outright, however. According to Frédéric Bozo, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris III, French policy concerning German unification and the changing dynamic in Europe in 1990 was straightforward: “it was, in the words of [Hubert] Védérine [the diplomatic advisor and chief of staff to Mitterrand], about ‘going along with the developments while trying at best to control possibly

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 791. [do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page; revise](#)

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 791.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 159.

destabilizing aspects.’”⁵⁸ Contrary to the popular perception that France sought to impede, or even block, German unification, in fact Mitterrand’s underlying motivation for a controlled and multifaceted international framework for German unification was rooted in historical necessity. Indeed, as Bozo noted, Mitterrand was preoccupied with the risk of a violent international upheaval:

Hence, starting in 1989, the French president’s frequent references to ‘1913’ (the year of the Balkan war that was the prelude to the First World War), which, in his mind, epitomized the risk of fragmentation and nationalism associated with the end of the Cold War freeze, whether with regard to the liberation of Eastern Europe, to German unification, or, last but not least, to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and, of course, of Yugoslavia.⁵⁹

As with Thatcher, another aspect of Mitterrand’s concern as to the pace of German unification was rooted in an assessment of Moscow’s willingness to accept it. According to Bozo, Mitterrand’s “preoccupation with the interplay between the Soviet situation and the German question thus had a major role in his attitude with regard to the latter: hence his reservations as to the pace of unification until Gorbachev gave his ‘green light’ to GDR leader Hans Modrow in late January 1990.”⁶⁰ While France’s role in German unification is often viewed as ancillary in nature, Bozo’s article challenges this perception to show that, though France was initially reluctant to fully acknowledge the rapidity of events, Paris would come to actively participate and encourage Germany’s unification and integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

However, the available evidence suggests that neither France nor the United Kingdom offered Moscow any assurances about the prospect of NATO enlargement after Germany’s reunification. That is, neither London nor Paris promised Moscow that future

⁵⁸ Frédéric Bozo, “Mitterrand’s France, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification: A Reappraisal,” *Cold War History* (November 2007), Vol. 7, Issue 4, p. 464. Bozo cites Hubert Védrine, *Les Mondes de François Mitterrand: A L’Elysée 1981-1995* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p. 425.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 465.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 466.

NATO enlargement would not extend beyond the territory of the former East Germany. The subject seems not to have been raised in the discussions involving Britain and France.

From a security perspective, a real concern to the West was the possibility of a jockeying for favor from a powerful Germany. Both the West and the East would be tempted to court the economically powerful Germany, and this could lead to an escalation of East-West tension. Also, lacking a collective defense umbrella, Germany could feel compelled to develop its own nuclear deterrent capability. Once it was evident that German unification was in fact a reality at hand, this very fear would be the rallying point for a united Germany tied to NATO rather than neutralized and without the restraint of an alliance partnership. With the United States taking the lead for the Alliance, negotiations began to develop quite quickly.

After being briefed by Bush and Baker, Kohl and Gorbachev met on 10 February 1990. According to Zelikow and Rice, “Kohl said that Germany had to remain in NATO, but he could accept a plan restricting NATO forces (not NATO ‘jurisdiction’) to the former FRG.”⁶¹ While this commitment was less encompassing, it clearly was meant to accommodate Soviet security concerns. This is consistent with a continuing theme in the discussions in early February 1990 regarding a united Germany and NATO and their relationship with the Soviet Union. Not only were there controversial conversations involving Baker, Genscher, Shevardnadze, Gorbachev, and Kohl; there was also a statement by NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner on 8 February 1990 regarding the potential for accommodations to Soviet concerns.

In addition, special arrangements could be devised to take account of Soviet security interests with a united Germany as a member of the Atlantic Alliance. A

⁶¹ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 188.

component of such an arrangement could be a special military status for the territory of the GDR, or perhaps an agreement not to extend military integration to that territory. These are just two possibilities out of many which could be conceived.⁶²

In the span of three days, 8-10 February 1990, representatives from three distinctly different Western entities (the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, and NATO) all gave implicit or explicit assurances to limit the scope of NATO's future aspirations. The implication was that if the Soviets agreed to a united Germany in NATO, key members of the Alliance (Germany and the United States) would, in a quid pro quo, limit the geographical extent of NATO's future membership. In retrospect, this might well have been the deciding factor in the Soviet agreement to accept a united Germany fully integrated in NATO. There would be a hard fought diplomatic battle in the coming months to finally garner a clear commitment from Moscow.

While Washington and Bonn (in particular Chancellor Kohl) were pressing for NATO to remain central in future European security arrangements, some West German officials (Genscher above all) and Moscow were seeking new security arrangements in Europe with a distinctly European orientation that threatened to alienate the United States and mark the end of forty years of Alliance leadership in European affairs.

⁶² Manfred Wörner, 8 February 1990, "Atlantic Alliance and German Unity: Speech by Secretary General, Manfred Wörner at the Überseeclub," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1990/s900208a_e.htm, (accessed 8 April 2009).

V. SOVIET AND RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVES

This chapter examines the Soviet perspective on the alleged U.S. and West German assurances regarding NATO expansion and, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian perspective. This chapter discusses why those perceived assurances were important to Soviet decision-making about German unification and European security.

To appreciate the Soviet perspective regarding Germany's unification and its prospective NATO membership, it is necessary to place the discussion in the proper context. The Soviet Union was seeing the breakdown of communism in nearly all of the Warsaw Pact countries, namely Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, in addition to East Germany. Just as alarming to Moscow were growing secessionist movements among the Soviet Union's member republics, specifically the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Economically, the Soviet Union was in crisis. The command economy had been running in the red for years, valuable resources had been funneled into the losing war in Afghanistan, and the arms competition with the United States had consumed disproportionately massive inputs of technology and capital investment. The result was a bankrupt system that could not meet the basic needs of its population well, resulting in widespread depression and domestic discontent.

An emotional conviction that was able to withstand these great societal challenges (and that remains today) in Russia was a sense of national greatness, an almost fated greatness that history and geography guaranteed. This feeling was well expressed in a striking article published in January 1993 in *International Affairs* (Moscow) by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation entitled "Russia is a Great Power," written by Elgiz Pozdnyakov. According to Pozdnyakov, "Our present life would seem to be devoid of anything visible bearing out the correctness and aptness of the words 'Russia is a great power.' But while these words may sound surprising, I venture to affirm that few Russians will fail to perceive them as natural and their meaning as self-

evident.”⁶³ Pozdnyakov described Russia’s greatness as “genetic, inborn; it comes from the native soil itself, from its roots lying deep in history. No rational proof is needed to confirm it – indeed, such proof could be counterproductive.”⁶⁴ While this article was written following German unification and the collapse of both the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, it describes a consistent historical theme in the Russian self-perception. This persistent theme is the emotional antithesis to the events that were witnessed in Eastern Europe in 1990. The great Soviet empire was falling to pieces; the Soviet economic and political system was in turmoil, and it fell to Mikhail Gorbachev to manage these historical changes that flew in the face of every Russian’s sense of national identity and status. To make matters worse, Gorbachev enjoyed a narrow margin of political control and was constantly trying to bolster his position within the Supreme Soviet, where he was often accused of squandering Soviet greatness.

As a result of political reforms Gorbachev had been instituting in the Soviet Union, Soviet political control over Eastern Europe began to shift to a more permissive stance as early as 1986. In that year all the CSCE states adopted the Document of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe. In this document the parties pledged “to refrain from the threat or use of force in their relations with any state, regardless of that state’s political, social, economic, or cultural system and irrespective of whether or not they maintain with that state relations of alliance.”⁶⁵ In retrospect, some observers have argued, this pledge gave the green light for the communist governments of Eastern and Central Europe to manage their countries as they saw fit. It was interpreted as obliging Moscow to abandon the Brezhnev Doctrine. It also opened the door for dissenters to begin to make moves that would, in just three years, bring down the Wall and end the Cold War.

⁶³ Elgiz Pozdnyakov, “Russia is a Great Power,” *International Affairs* (January 1993), p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Stockholm Document quoted in Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 74.

Another move that, some experts argue, sped up the process of democratization in Eastern and Central Europe was the successful conclusion of Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) negotiations. The INF treaty was signed on 8 December 1987. The INF agreement unexpectedly spurred on talks for conventional arms reduction in Europe. In December 1988, primarily for economic reasons, Gorbachev announced a unilateral draw-down of military forces in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. This included “removing from East Germany four tank divisions, close to 4,000 tanks, and the only Soviet air assault brigade in the GDR, and from Czechoslovakia and Hungary two further tank divisions.”⁶⁶ The total withdrawals of 50,000 troops, in conjunction with tank cuts, from Eastern Europe equaled or exceeded requests from the West. This move further enabled the citizens of the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries to act boldly, leading to the ousting of Communism in those countries in the course of 1989.

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 caught the leadership of the Soviet Union utterly unprepared to deal with the rapid events that were about to unfold. The implications for Soviet foreign policy and the impact to the psyche of the USSR were immense. In his autobiography, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, Eduard Shevardnadze writes: “The conviction that the existence of two Germanys maintained the security of the Soviet Union and the whole continent was too deeply rooted. We had paid an enormous price for it, and to write it off was inconceivable.”⁶⁷ It is not surprising that on 29 November 1989 Shevardnadze announced, in response to Kohl’s ten-point plan the previous day, a “warning of German ‘revanchism’... and opposed any European border changes.”⁶⁸ Indeed, this attitude was reinforced by many in the Soviet government. For example, another outspoken critic of Kohl’s ten-point plan was Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov, who said “there is not one country in Europe today which would endorse reunification.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 53. [do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page; revise](#)

⁶⁷ Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 132.

⁶⁸ Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 77.

⁶⁹ Gennady Gerasimov quoted in Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 156.

The issue for Moscow was not so much German unity or the threat that it might pose. The issue for Moscow was two fold: how to reorient the security environment to ensure the continued safety of the Soviet Union, and how to manage the domestic reaction to the breakdown of empire that was being added to the already real economic hardship being experienced by the population. In this context Shevardnadze writes:

Thus, from the outset we linked the German unity issue with the problem of forming new structures of European security. We wished to see the unification of Germany take place over a fairly extended period. We needed to bring Soviet public opinion around to the realization that it was really happening. That is why for so long we did not consent to Germany's membership in NATO.⁷⁰

In a private conversation with Genscher, Gorbachev commented on Kohl's ten-point plan with great anxiety: "How can we talk about 'building a new Europe' if you [Germany] act this way? Kohl assured me that the FRG doesn't want to destabilize the situation in the GDR, that he would act responsibly. But the chancellor's actual steps contradict his assurances."⁷¹ Gorbachev feared the instability that was taking place in the GDR. He deemed any move to speed the process of unification irresponsible. He recognized the dangers of unhindered and reckless decision making without the necessary consultations with all parties involved.

Shevardnadze admits that the Soviet Union had only two options with regard to German unification. The first option was, through the "two-plus-four" mechanism and multilateral talks among European countries, to achieve "an agreement on the final legal settlement of the German question, which would serve our security interests and the cause of stability in Europe. The second alternative was to use our half-million troops in East Germany to block unification."⁷² The second alternative was really no option,

70 Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 132.

71 Gorbachev quoted in Anatoly Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, trans. and ed. by Robert D. English and Elizabeth Tucker (University Park, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 237.

72 Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 133.

because German unification was clearly going to happen. The challenge for Soviet statesmen was how to best manage it to a beneficial outcome for the Soviet Union, or at least an outcome not to their disadvantage.

In Moscow, various concepts for the external relationship that a united Germany would have with the existing security structures in Europe were discussed. Ideas ranged from a neutral united Germany tied to neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact, to the reverse: a united Germany as a member of both alliance structures, bridging Europe and bringing East to West. Early on, it was decided that neither of these ideas would be realistic, given the dynamic political and strategic challenges facing the continent. Following an April 1990 meeting in Washington, Shevardnadze, during a press conference, stated:

We are not persuaded by the argument presented to us in favor of including a united Germany in NATO. We called attention to the one-sided character of such an approach and called for a qualitatively new security system in Europe – through the consistent transformation of the politico-military alliances, with a subsequent transition to nonbloc, collective structures. Along with other states, the future Germany would take its place in this system.⁷³

In his autobiography, Shevardnadze was able to succinctly summarize the objectives of Moscow: “the first was a real reduction of armaments in Europe, including those on German soil. The second was to combine the process of unification with the formation of pan-European structures of security. The third was a reorganization of NATO and new relations between the allies.”⁷⁴ It was from this foundation and intellectual prism that the Soviets conducted and concluded the negotiations. Above all Moscow, justifiably feeling strategically vulnerable, wanted German unification intrinsically coupled to new security structures in Europe with no dominant player, particularly not the Soviet Union’s rival, the United States.

73 E. A. Shevardnadze, “Shevardnadze Holds Talks in Washington,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (9 May 1990), Vol. 42 No. 18, p. 9. Excerpts from a 7 April 1990 Washington D.C. press conference for Soviet and foreign journalists.

74 Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 135.

This is not to say that Moscow was against NATO per se. As a matter of fact, Moscow saw two merits in NATO. First, Shevardnadze and some other Soviet leaders recognized the stability that NATO had brought to Europe during the preceding forty years. The Alliance had led the way to great economic integration and political consultation throughout Western Europe. Prosperity and peace followed. Second, with the crumbling of the communist governments of the Warsaw Pact and the economic turmoil experienced in the Soviet Union, NATO provided a ready-made and stable security structure that could be incorporated into a new and wider structure that would “reach from Vancouver to Vladivostok.” The Soviet hope was that NATO would transition from a military bloc to a political organization, with its security responsibilities being absorbed by an organization like the CSCE.

What was the Soviet view of the informal assurances that the Allies would not extend the jurisdiction of NATO eastward if Moscow accepted a united Germany in NATO? These assurances by Baker to both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev were ostensibly made in Moscow on 8 and 9 February 1990. It is therefore striking that, in the first days of the two-plus-four talks in Bonn in May 1990, Shevardnadze announced: “We propose that the following principle be observed: Nothing is agreed to until all the aspects of a settlement are agreed to, until a complete balance of interests so vital to an undertaking of such dimensions as a German settlement is found.”⁷⁵ While the principle is sound and the reasoning respectable, so stated it negated any assurances made prior to the opening and completion of the two-plus-four negotiations. Another fact undermines Moscow’s claim that binding assurances were given by Western governments with regard to NATO enlargement following German unification: the final two-plus-four treaty included no provision concerning future NATO enlargement.

Opinions began to shift among decision makers in Moscow in May 1990. Following the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s completion of a state-of-Europe review and in preparation for the Bush-Gorbachev Washington Summit from 30 May to 2 June 1990,

⁷⁵ E. A. Shevardnadze, “Shevardnadze addresses ‘2 + 4’ talks,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (6 June 1990), Vol. 42 No. 18, p. 11. Speech delivered in Bonn on 6 May 1990.

Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze drafted a memorandum to President Gorbachev providing guidance and recommendation concerning German unification and a unified Germany's participation in NATO. In the German unification section he noted:

After careful consideration, we believe that a united Germany, contrary to our long-standing views, will not be a threat to the Soviet Union. As the matters stand now, the countries which should be fearful of [the economic might of] a united Germany are the countries of Western Europe. We and the countries of Eastern Europe, on the other hand, are in no position economically to compete with a unified Germany. What we need is economic and financial assistance. In view of our own difficult situation, we are hardly in a position to reject German aid.⁷⁶

In the section concerning Germany's relationship with NATO, Shevardnadze wrote:

Our [Foreign Ministry] answer differs somewhat from the established Soviet position that Germany in NATO would be a threat to our territorial integrity and security. The reason for our new position is that a careful analysis of NATO shows that the Alliance has changed considerably. Indeed they have already changed, and NATO will continue to exist at least temporarily for one reason only: to tie the United States to Europe through the use of an existing organization – which the Soviet Union has favored for some time – although we would prefer to see this tie maintained through the mechanism of the 35-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.⁷⁷

He ended his memo by writing that “we should not oppose a united Germany in NATO because NATO is changing rapidly and Germany's presence therein will accelerate its transformation and the eventual end of the organization.”⁷⁸ While the advice to Gorbachev from his advisors was to push ahead with negotiations in the direction of a united Germany in NATO, Gorbachev continued to slow down the process to gain as much advantage as possible.

⁷⁶ Eduard Shevardnadze and Walter R. Roberts, “Germany I: the Gorbachev memorandum,” *The World Today* (October 1990), Vol. 46, No. 10, p. 181.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

At a joint press conference with Mitterrand held on 25 May 1990 in Moscow, Gorbachev was asked by a Novosti Press Agency journalist: “What place did questions concerning new all-European security structures and the problem of accelerating the creation of new all-European security structures occupy in your talks?” Gorbachev replied, “The President and I devoted a great deal of time to the subject of how we can synchronize German unification and the process of creating European security structures.”⁷⁹ It is not surprising that the Soviet Union and France were able to agree on the need for new security structures in Europe, as both had reservations concerning NATO, particularly U.S. dominance in the organization. They nonetheless also shared the widespread view that NATO functioned as a stabilizing European institution. Gorbachev would take his conflicting opinions to his talks with Bush during the Washington Summit held from 30 May to 2 June 1990.

The German question was, as expected, central to the discussions during the Washington summit. Gorbachev at one point reverted back to the idea of a united Germany with dual membership in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Bush responded that that would be “unacceptable.” On 31 May they reached a compromise based on Bush’s recommendation:

I would suggest...[that] the United States expresses unqualified support for the membership of a unified Germany in NATO. However, if Germany itself makes a different choice, we’ll respect that and not raise any objection.” Gorbachev replied, “I agree. I accept your formulation.”⁸⁰

Gorbachev’s decision to allow Germany to choose which, if either, alliance to join was in keeping with the principles outlined in the Helsinki Final Act. Two specific principles directly applied to the German unification discussions. The first principle considered relates to whether the two Germanys could unite. The Helsinki Final Act reads:

⁷⁹ M. S. Gorbachev, “Press Conference by M. S. Gorbachev and F. Mitterrand” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (27 June 1990), Vol. 42, No. 21, p. 25.

⁸⁰ Anatoly Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, trans. and ed. by Robert D. English and Elizabeth Tucker (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 273.

By virtue of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, all peoples always have the right, in full freedom, to determine, when and as they wish, their internal and external political status, without external interference, and to pursue as they wish their political, economic, social and cultural development.⁸¹

Gorbachev's early recognition of the rights of the German people to unite as one country is consistent with the principle outlined above.

The second principle that was significant to the German unification discussions, and the one that encountered much debate, concerns alliance membership. The Helsinki Final Act states that

[Participating States] will respect each other's right to define and conduct as it wishes its relations with other States in accordance with international law and in the spirit of the present Declaration. They also have the right to belong or not to belong to international organizations, to be or not to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties including the right to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance; they also have the right to neutrality.⁸²

It was this principle that finally influenced Gorbachev to allow Germany to join NATO. Indeed, as Hannes Adomeit has noted, during the 31 May 1990 meeting between Bush and Gorbachev the former

introduced an argument that other US and West German officials had begun to employ at lower levels. Under the CSCE's principles in the Helsinki Final Act, all nations had the right to choose their own alliances.⁸³

Gorbachev agreed, and on 3 June 1990, President Bush, following approval of the text by Gorbachev, released a public statement that read:

⁸¹ Helsinki Final Act, 1975, Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hannes Adomeit, *Gorbachev's Consent to Unified Germany's Membership in NATO*, Working Paper FG5 2006/11 (Berlin: Stifaung Wissenschaft und Politik, 11 December 2006), p. 12.

On the matter of Germany's external alliances, I believe, as do Chancellor Kohl and members of the Alliance, that the united Germany should be a full member of NATO. President Gorbachev, frankly, does not hold that view. But we are in full agreement that the matter of alliance membership is, in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, a matter for the Germans to decide.⁸⁴

In agreeing, Gorbachev had conceded his hand and relegated the discussion of a united Germany in NATO to one of wrapping up the details.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 13. [do not use Ibid as first footnote on a page](#)

VI. CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the consequences and implications of the 1990 misunderstanding between the Soviet Union and key Western governments, including the loss of the trust gained during the German unification discussions.

By pressing the Soviet Union to dramatically shift the European geostrategic balance in favor of NATO, the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany knowingly threatened an escalation of geopolitical tensions. While the outcome proved worth the risks involved, the United States' strategic venture could have had vastly different results. Indeed, strategic disputes exist today between NATO and Russia, with the latter intermittently referring to its perception of past wrongs by the former as a justification for mistrust and apprehension.

In accepting the inclusion of the united Germany in NATO, the Soviet Union essentially forfeited its most significant World War II war-prize and with it the Warsaw Pact's future. The Soviet system would itself soon collapse, plunging Russia and some elements of its former empire into disarray. While the self-perception of Russians as the leaders of a Eurasian empire and a worldwide communist movement was damaged, their historical expectations as to their country's great power status have remained. Russian officials continue to view the world, in particular Eurasia, as divided between "theirs and ours." According to Hannes Adomeit, a highly regarded German expert on Russia, "A major factor limiting Russian multilateralism in NATO (and EU) are persistent Russian notions of international relations as a zero-sum game (the gain of one side is the loss of the other) and the unmitigated importance of competition, conflict, and the 'balance of power' in international affairs."⁸⁵ He further notes, "Putin also has called the dissolution of the Soviet Union a 'national tragedy of immense proportions' and the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.'"⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Hannes Adomeit, *Inside or Outside? Russia's Policies Towards NATO*, Working Paper (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 01 January 2007), p. 22.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

This attitude alone does not necessarily portend international conflict. What raises concern is the combination of this attitude with the perception that Russia has been slighted, or – worse – deceived and betrayed. In 2007 Vyacheslav Igrunov, Director of the Institute of Humanities and Political Studies in Moscow, expressed a widespread viewpoint in Russia: “It is worth taking into consideration another point, if to recollect the first wave of NATO enlargement to the east. Then Russia appealed to [the] NATO promise not to enlarge to the east. NATO answered that it is not Russia’s problem and Russia isn’t entitled to vote. It is necessary to realize that politics is not only about displaying one’s strength, but also about displaying the other party’s weakness.”⁸⁷ The building blocks of trust that had been formed between NATO and the Soviet Union during the German unification process – and carried forward in NATO-Russian relations after 1991 – now appear to have crumbled.

Discussions about expanding the Alliance began in early 1993. By 1999, NATO had expanded to include three former Warsaw Pact members (the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland). The decision to expand NATO was not without controversy, nor did opponents forget the promises made to the USSR. During this first round of NATO expansion discussions a leading Russian political scientist, Sergei Karaganov, expressed his perspective as follows:

For Russians, NATO expansion is a psychological question as much as a strategic one; it involves mutual trust and Western recognition of Russia’s status. Expansion would result in a shift in the whole Russian perception of the West...It would confirm a feeling of having been if not defeated, then at least tricked and framed. In 1990, we were told quite clearly by the West that the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and German unification would not lead to NATO expansion.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Vyacheslav Igrunov, “Russia-NATO: Prospects of Cooperation,” *Eurasian Home*, 1 June 2007, <http://www.eurasianhome.org/xml/t/expert.xml?lang=en&nic=expert&pid=1113>, (accessed 8 April 2009).

⁸⁸ Sergei Karaganov quoted in Marianne Hanson, “Russia and NATO Expansion: The Uneasy Basis of the Founding Act,” *European Security*, Vol. 7, No.2, Summer 1998, p. 22.

Karaganov effectively expressed the prevailing opinion of leading Russian policy makers and addressed both the issues of trust and prior assurance given to Russia.

While the controversy about the assurances offered to Moscow persisted during the first round of NATO expansion discussions, it is not limited to that time frame; the alleged assurances continue to have profound implications and effects today.

From a Russian perspective, the Alliance has continued to ignore Russian protests concerning NATO expansion and Russia's strategic isolation. In 2004 seven more countries joined NATO, exacerbating Russian-NATO tensions. While the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany may not have intended to give assurances to the Soviet Union not to expand NATO eastward in exchange for Moscow's acceptance of Germany in NATO, this message was clearly received in Moscow. The trust that was built between Moscow and the Alliance during the dynamic European transition of 1990-1991 has been effectively lost. In an interview in May 2008, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke of the lost trust between Russia and the United States: "The Americans promised that NATO wouldn't move beyond the boundaries of Germany after the Cold War but now half of central and eastern Europe are members, so what happened to their promises? It shows they cannot be trusted."⁸⁹

At the heart of the matter is Russia's claim to have a special sphere of influence. Many Russians hold that the further expansion of NATO to the east encroaches on their national interests. As Derek Averre of the University of Birmingham has observed, "The Russian Federation (RF) inherited the expectation that the West would heed its opinion on the main European security issues and would unconditionally acknowledge the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] as a sphere of vital interest to Russia."⁹⁰ Russian President Dmitry Medvedev confirmed this judgment recently when he laid out five guiding principles in Russian foreign policy. One of these principles was that Russia is entitled to a sphere of influence:

⁸⁹ Adrian Blomfield and Mike Smith, "Gorbachev: US Could Start New Cold War," *The Daily Telegraph*, 07 May 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1933223/Gorbachev-US-could-start-new-Cold-War.html>, (accessed 8 April 2009).

⁹⁰ Derek Averre, "NATO Expansion and Russian National Interests," *European Security*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring 1998), p 11.

Russia, just like other countries in the world, has regions where it has its privileged interests. In these regions, there are countries with which we have traditionally had friendly cordial relations, historically special relations. We will work very attentively in these regions and develop these friendly relations with these states, with our close neighbors.⁹¹

The problem with this expectation by Russia is what it implies. If, in fact, Russia had a legitimate claim to special privileges in the regions that made up its former empire, the right of nations to self-determination that Soviet leaders from Brezhnev to Gorbachev (as well as post-Soviet Russian leaders) recognized in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 would not be respected. Additionally, the very argument that Russia has a legitimate sphere of influence that the West should respect undermines the claim that Russia is not a threat to its neighbors. Indeed, the argument that Moscow has a right to a sphere of influence can be viewed as imperialistic in nature.

Whether the apparent misunderstanding on Moscow's part about NATO's enlargement options after German unification could have been avoided through more precise diplomatic discussions may never be known. It is clear that the vague informal assurances given to the Soviet Union concerning NATO expansion in 1990, even if withdrawn or reformulated by the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, still remain prominent in Russian thinking and provide a crutch that Russians use to prop up their argument as to betrayal by the West. NATO governments may therefore expect to hear more in the future from Russia about broken promises and warranted suspicion towards the West.

Many observers in Central and Eastern Europe maintain that Russia is still a threat to their security. This view has been recently substantiated by threats to Poland coming from Russia in response to the U.S.-Polish agreement to base U.S. missile defense interceptors on Polish territory. "In a chilling echo of the Cold War, Russia gave warning that Poland was 'exposing itself to a strike — 100 per cent' after signing a deal

⁹¹ Dmitry Medvedev quoted in Paul Reynolds, "New Russian World Order: the Five Principles," BBC News, 1 September 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7591610.stm>.

with the US to set up a missile shield on Polish soil.”⁹² This statement by General Anatoli Nogovitsyn, the deputy chief of the general staff in Moscow, raised tension between the two countries to levels not seen since the end of the Cold War. Nogovitsyn said “that Russian military doctrine sanctioned the use of nuclear weapons ‘against the allies of countries having nuclear weapons if they in some way help them’, as Poland had done in signing the deal.”⁹³ While this and similar Russian threats are seen by some in Europe as clearly provocative, other Europeans regard the Russian threats as saber rattling in order to express a clear objection to continued NATO encroachment into Russia’s “privileged spaces.” Russian policy makers are evidently concerned about U.S. dominance in NATO, the principal organization for collective defense in Europe.

As during the Cold War, many in Russia see in NATO expansion the drawing of new dividing lines in Europe with Russia on the opposing side. President Medvedev spoke of this at to the World Policy Conference in Evian, France, on 8 October 2008: “But the real issue is that NATO is bringing its military infrastructure right up to our borders and is drawing new dividing lines in Europe, this time along our western and southern frontiers.”⁹⁴ Russia continues to interpret NATO’s enlargement policy as confrontational. Since NATO expansion was first officially discussed in 1993, Russian’s maintain, Moscow’s requests for restraint and respect for its security interests have gone largely ignored. With no expectation that NATO’s behavior will change, Russia has made moves that appear to be intended to rebalance the geopolitical dynamic.

Unable to effectively stop the expansion of NATO, or gain the influence it seeks in European security decision-making, Russia has promoted multipolarity as a means to regain international “great power” status and counter what is perceived as US unipolarity. According to Thomas Ambrosio, associate professor of political science at North Dakota

⁹² Catherine Philp and Tony Halpin, “Russia in Nuclear Threat to Poland,” *The Times Online*, 16 August 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article4543744.ece> (accessed 26 March 2009).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Dmitry Medvedev, Speech at World Policy Conference, Evian, France, 8 October 2008, President of Russia: Official Portal, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/10/08/2159_type82912type82914_207457.shtml#, (accessed 8 April 2009).

State University, "Russia's quest for multipolarity is aimed at creating conditions in which Russia can effectively resist American military, geopolitical, and economic encroachment."⁹⁵ In Ambrosio's view, Russia is not seeking means of offensive action, but is engaged in defensive maneuvering. "Rather than seeking direct confrontation with the United States, great powers will attempt to create conditions which allow for them to resist US influence and protect traditional spheres of influence from American encroachment."⁹⁶ In an effort to engage other disgruntled powers, Moscow has looked to Beijing.

With a common interest in hedging against the mutually perceived emerging American hegemony, Russia and China released a joint communiqué following an April 1996 Beijing summit that identified "'hegemonism, power politics and repeated imposition of pressure on other countries' among the most serious problems facing the international community."⁹⁷ Over the years the Sino-Russian relationship has continued to develop from its once conflicted past. Under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an organization to improve trust and cooperation in shared border areas, Russia and China have conducted two joint military exercises: "Peace Mission 2005" in China in August 2005 and "Peace Mission 2007" in Russia in August 2007. Peace Mission 2005 involved just Russia and China, while Peace Mission 2007 involved all the members of the SCO (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). The SCO activities constitute an example of the attempts at multi-polar balancing that may be motivated in fact by a determination to respond to NATO enlargement.

On 23 May 2008 Russia's newly elected President, Dmitry Medvedev, in an unusual political move, made his first foreign visit not to Europe, as might have been expected, but to China. This political move could be indicative of a continuing strategic shift from West to East or simply a message to the West, particularly to the United States,

⁹⁵ Thomas Ambrosio, "Russia's Quest for Multipolarity: A Response to US Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era," *European Security*, Vol.10, No. 1, Spring 2001: p. 47.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

that neither Russia nor China will be deterred from acting on a shared view of United States hegemonic dominance. "Some don't like such strategic cooperation between our countries, but we understand that this cooperation serves the interests of our people, and we will strengthen it, regardless of whether others like it or not," the Russian leader said. "Russian-Chinese relations are one of the most important factors of maintaining stability in modern conditions."⁹⁸ This visit by President Medvedev to Beijing took place shortly after the NATO Bucharest Summit in April 2008.

In another blow to Russian prestige and perceived disregard for its security interests, NATO leaders announced at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit: "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO."⁹⁹ With no Membership Action Plan offered, the stated acknowledgment that eventual membership is certain was quite unusual.

It is clear that compromises within NATO are required to manage diverging interests among the Allies. On the one hand, several NATO European nations have an interdependent relationship with Russia with respect to energy resources. These interests no doubt play an important role in European-Russian relations and require consideration from the United States if agreements are to be reached that may provoke further irritation in Russia. On the other hand, the United States and some other members of NATO see the expansion of NATO to encompass former Soviet republics as bringing a measure of stability to historically volatile regions. Many former Soviet republics – as well as many former Soviet satellite states of Central and Eastern Europe that are now members of NATO – fear a resurgent Russia and look to NATO to provide protection. Faced with the

⁹⁸Medvedev quoted in Vladimir Isachenkov, "Medvedev defends Russia-China Ties," *FoxNews.com*, 24 May 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/prINTER_friendly_wires/2008May24/0,4675,ChinaRussia,00.html, (accessed 8 April 2009).

⁹⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization Press Releases, "Bucharest Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Press Release (2008)049, **par. 23**, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html>, (accessed 25 March 2009).

prospect of NATO reaching Russia's southern and western border, some Russians may have decided to make the threat of large-scale war sufficiently daunting to dampen the will of the NATO Allies to expand the Alliance.

The origins of the conflict in Georgia in August 2008 have a complex history that is outside the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to frame some key facts about this conflict and to consider the possible linkage to Russian objections to NATO enlargement. The February 2008 recognition of the independence of Kosovo by the United States and many European Union countries was met with strong disapproval by Russia and, not surprisingly, Georgia. While their positions on Kosovo were similar, their motivations were quite different. For Russia, the opposition to Kosovar independence stemmed from its steady support of Serbia and the mandate to maintain the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia outlined in UNSC Resolution 1244, which established the peace operations conducted in Kosovo since June 1999. Russia sees the recognition of Kosovar independence as a clear violation of this UNSC mandate and therefore as inconsistent with international norms and established international law. Moreover, Moscow fears that recognition of Kosovar independence could function as an invitation for secessionist movements that would directly affect Russia's own territorial integrity and domestic security.

Georgia's opposition to Kosovar independence is directly connected to the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Since the early 1990s Abkhazia and South Ossetia have exercised *de facto* autonomy in conjunction with their unrecognized claim of independence from Georgia. While Moscow had withheld recognition of independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia supported the desire for autonomous governance in these regions of Georgia. Moscow repeatedly reaffirmed support for Georgia's territorial integrity in UNSC resolutions, but also provided an economic life-line to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as Russian passports to many of the residents of the regions.

Longstanding tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi took a distinctly upward turn in April 2008 when Russia accused Georgia of a military buildup on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia: "A Russian Foreign Ministry official has accused Georgia

of building up its military near the country's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and warned that Russian forces will defend the areas if they are attacked.”¹⁰⁰ This buildup of Georgian forces may have been intended to send a clear message to Abkhazia and South Ossetia to refrain from further independence efforts that might be considered in light of Kosovo’s success. In response to Georgia’s military moves Russia began a reinforcement of its peacekeeping forces, which have been in place in the regions since 1994. This action can also be interpreted as directed against the NATO announcement of an open invitation to Georgia and Ukraine for alliance membership. By drawing attention to the instability at the Georgian border, Russia might have hoped to deter NATO allies from extending a membership invitation to Georgia, given the implications of honoring NATO’s Article 5 obligations. This appears to have been one of the consequences of the August 2008 invasion of Georgia by Russian forces.

On 8 August 2008, following an attempt by Georgian military forces to “liberate” South Ossetia from its Moscow-supported leadership the previous day, Russian military forces invaded Georgia with the objective, as stated by Russian President Medvedev, of “protect[ing] the lives and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they may be.”¹⁰¹ While there is much debate as to which side was the provocateur, this first combat action by Russian forces outside their borders since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 caused international alarm and continues to have serious implications.

On 26 August 2008 President Medvedev announced that Russia had recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia: “they addressed to Russia with a request to recognize their independence. Taking into consideration the free will of the peoples, the UN Charter and OSCE documents, I have signed decrees to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on behalf of the Russian Federation. This is

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, “Russia Accuses Georgia of Military Buildup near Breakaway Regions,” *VOA News*, 25 April 2008, <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-04/2008-04-25-voa50.cfm?CFID=147270753&CFTOKEN=75388360&jsessionid=8430d9ce482525e7ebcb275ee3515231c371>, (accessed 27 March 2009).

¹⁰¹ Dmitry Medvedev, “RAW DATA: Russian President Medvedev’s Statement on Georgia Crisis,” *Fox News*, 8 August 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400321,00.html>, (accessed 16 April 2009).

the only way to save people's lives,' Medvedev said.”¹⁰² While this move by Moscow to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent countries has been met with almost universal condemnation, it has definitely put on hold the prospects for NATO membership of Georgia and Ukraine. On 2 December 2008 NATO foreign ministers decided to postpone offers of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine. According to a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty report, “the fact remains – and was stressed by both NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice – that both Georgia and Ukraine still fall short of basic NATO standards in terms of both political reform and military readiness.”¹⁰³ While the stated reason was internal unpreparedness, one cannot exclude the impact the Russia-Georgia conflict had on NATO's willingness to further antagonize Moscow with MAP offers to Ukraine and Georgia.

Owing in part to Moscow's consistent resistance to what it sees as NATO dominance in European security decision-making and firm opposition to perceived US hegemonic behavior, Russia continues to make proposals for the establishment of new European security institutions. According to Vladimir Socor, Russia “wants an OSCE summit to create a new, Euro-Atlantic-Eurasian security framework that would override NATO and give Russia – on a par with NATO, the United States, and the European Union – a decision-making role in the new, overarching framework. This would result in an OSCE-like system, with Russia as a veto-wielding party.”¹⁰⁴ A 5 December 2008 statement by the Delegation of Romania on behalf of NATO responded to the Russian call for greater cooperation in European security: “Russia's action in Georgia ‘called into

¹⁰² Dmitry Medvedev, “Russia recognizes South Ossetia and Abkhazia to save people's lives,” *Pravda.ru*, 26 August 2008, http://english.pravda.ru/russia/kremlin/26-08-2008/106214-russia_ossetia_abkhazia-0, (accessed 27 March 2009).

¹⁰³ Liz Fuller, “Georgia, Ukraine Told They Do Not Meet Standards for NATO Membership,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 December 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Georgia_Ukraine_Told_They_Do_Not_Meet_Standards_For_NATO_Membership/1355925.html, (accessed 27 March 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Vladimir Socor, “Russia's Invasion of Georgia Overshadows OSCE's Year-End Conference,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5, Issue: 230, December 3, 2008.

question Russia's commitment to fundamental OSCE principles.'"¹⁰⁵ It appears that the Russian arguments for cooperation and trust are falling on unreceptive ears with little prospect for a future commitment from NATO or European Union nations to embrace Russian proposals for a new framework for security.

Signs of Russian belligerence have persisted. In defense of the February 2009 decision to pursue the closure of the American base in Kyrgyzstan, Igor V. Barinov, a member of the Russian Parliament, presented his view of the circumstances:

A lot of these things...are the consequences of the attitude that NATO takes and has taken in recent years toward mutually important issues that touch upon the interests of Russia – beginning with the Balkans and Yugoslavia, Kosovo, NATO moving eastward, to Ukraine and Georgia, the Baltic states. And if more attention had been paid toward Russia's opinion, then the situation would now be much better.¹⁰⁶

Barinov's statement can be seen as a consequence of NATO not fulfilling the three primary goals that Shevardnadze identified as being important to the Soviet Union during the German unification discussions in 1990: first, a real reduction of armaments in Europe; second, the formation of new pan-European structures of security; and third, a reorganization of NATO as a more purely political organization and the establishment of new relations among the allies and with Russia.¹⁰⁷ While armaments in most of Europe have been lowered from Cold War levels, the second and third goals remain distant. Russia's sustained pursuit of these goals is linked to its continuing sense of grievance about NATO's enlargement process and its conviction that Moscow was offered assurances in 1990 that have not been honored.

¹⁰⁵ Vladimir Socor, "OSCE's Year-End Conference Continues Pattern of Failure," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5, Issue: 235, December 10, 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Clifford J. Levy, "Poker-Faced, Russia Flaunts Its Afghan Card," *NYTimes.com*, February 22, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/22/weekinreview/22levy.html>, (accessed 8 April 2009).

¹⁰⁷ Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 135.

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